

[Mrs. Mary Mathews Tolman]

[typed- LL?]

[Moss, L. L.?] S241-LA DUP

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

NAME OF WORKER Harold J. Moss ADDRESS 6934 Francis St. Lincoln, Neb

DATE March 7, 1939 SUBJECT American Folklore stuff

1. Name and address of informant. Mrs. Mary Mathews Tolman, 3052 Vine St.

Date and time of interview. March 7, 1939. 10 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.

3. Place of interview. Home of informant.

4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.

Mr. [Finnley?], State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebr. Glen H. Miller, 13th and G. St.

5. name and address of person, if any, accompanying you. None.

6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc. Well kept and furnished front living room, showing extreme good taste, bright and colorful in a subdued way and suggesting careful management of its occupants. Atmosphere of warmth and friendliness, cheerful and well lighted, pictures, keep sakes, clippings etc., hint of the fond memories of its occupant's long departed mate, deceased these many years.

House itself is located in a well to do thickly populated section of the city with many good type neighboring homes close at hand.

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Surroundings to the north merge rapidly into the less pretentious residence district bordering the [Mo. pac.?] rail road tracks. C15 - 2/27/41 - Nebraska

FORM B Personal History of Informant

NAME OF WORKER Harold J. Moss ADDRESS 6934 Francis St.

DATE March 7, 1939 SUBJECT American Folklore stuff

NAME AND ADDRESS OF INFORMANT. Mrs. Mary Mathews Tolman.

1. Ancestry. Second generation English
2. Place and date of birth. Rawlins, Wyo. Aug. 14, 1880
3. Family. 2 sons living, husband dead.
4. Lived, with dates. Rawlins, Wyo. 1880-1889. Ames, Nebraska 1889-1899. Silver Creek, " 1899-1916. Lincoln, Nebr. 1916-to date.
5. Education, with dates. Grade School Rawlins Wyo. [1886-1889.?] Ames, Nebr., 1889-1894. High School, Fremont 1894-1896 Fremont Normal
College 1896-1899 University of Nebr. 1916-1918 Columbia Uni. [??] 1918-1920.
6. Occupations and accomplishments, with dates. Home work 1899 to date. Dramatics, business and farm management 1916 to date.
7. special skills and interests. dramatics, and farm management.
8. Community and religious activities. Methodist church, crusading and working for high moral standards and temperance.

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9. Description of informant. Fine looking, regular features, very expressive and somewhat sensitive, clear youthful complexion.

10. Other points gained in interview. Smooth rounded face, clear bright eyes, white hair, but not exactly a mother type. Medium large stature, comfortably rounded out, appears younger than age by at least ten years. Intelligent, interesting talker, good expression pleasing personality, a bit high strung and with considerable temperament. Rather sensitive, spontaneous type.

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

NAME OF WORKER Harold J. Moss ADDRESS 6934 Francis St.

DATE March 7, 1939 SUBJECT American Folklore stuff

NAME AND ADDRESS OF INFORMANT. Mrs. Mary Matthews Tolman, 3062 Vine St.

My father was just a boy when the Union Pacific was being built but he and his father worked along the new road, mostly putting down [walls?]. Fathers name was John S. Matthews. The camps they lived in were very [rough?] and not very good environment for a young boy, but then boys were pretty rugged and able to take care of themselves, better than they could, perhaps do, today.

I really know very little of their experiences along the route of the railroad, but father was out near Ogden Utah and was present when they drove the golden spike, as the railroads track laying was completed. He held a stake or something for General Grant at the ceremony.

It was a thrilling experience for me when we moved to Ames, Nebraska. It was a great feeding ground in those days, with train loads of cattle, picturesque cowboys, coming in

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from distant places and a general cow-country atmosphere, with one of the greatest cattle feeding lots and barns in the world.

I married in [?] and Mr. Tolman and I went to silver Creek, Nebraska to live on one of his farms. There were very few America, English people living around us and most of the neighbors were Swiss, Hollander and Polish. These people were naturally [clanuish?] but still they made very good neighbors and were sociable to a certain extent. The Polish are narrow in their views of education and always sent their children to a parochial school.

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They really were the most clannish of the three groups around us. Like all catholics most of their affairs of solemnity, such as weddings funerals etc. were held in the morning, and they never [eat?] nor refreshed themselves until after the ceremony. They did it all on an empty stomach. Which is the spirit of self denial and [abstinence?], until the more important and sacred thing is done. Polish wedding

In the summer of 1915, we were invited to a Polish wedding at Silver Creek. The parents of the bride and groom personally invite the guests. This affair is vivid in my mind. the wedding was held early in the church and then the party and guests all went to the brides home for the big celebration. As we drove up four young men, near relatives of the bride and gaily dressed, with colored sashes, met us at the gate of the yard with them was the brides father. These four young men were the greeters and they sang a cheerful little ditty in Polish of course.

As they [sang?] they swayed and gestured, much like Swiss singers. The brides father then stepped forward with a half gallon decanter of brandy.

He produced small goblets and into each poured a drink of the brandy, which he offered to us. Neither of us had ever drank but we didn't know what else to do, so drank ours. It was very powerful Single Space

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When we got out of the car, the brides father led us up to the house, where we met his wife and bride. We then went into the house, where the tables were all set with burning candles and loaded with all kinds of food, a sumptuous repast.

No liquor of any kind was served at the table, just coffee. The guests just wandered in and out, helping themselves to the food, but not sitting down at the table.

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Out in the yard a pavillion had been built, reached by little steps and with a row of benches around the outside edge. The orchestra was located at one end and the dancers and the bride were on the floor or seated on the benches.

The bride must dance with whoever asks her. But first the man, wishing to dance goes before the orchestra and sings a few bars of whatever piece he would like them to play. No matter if he sang American or Polish, they seemed to know what it was and played it. Before he dances, the man then hands the orchestra leader some money, fifty cents to a dollar. He then would take the first dance with the bride. After that, he could dance with anyone and without paying the orchestra any more. This is the way they get their pay. Each dancer does this before he dances.

In another little pavillion, the uncle of the bride served brandy and wine. The serving of this finer liquor is always thus supervised, although it is all free. The beer however is on tap in / another location in the yard, one of the brides brothers usually helps with this, but the guests can help themselves.

The magnificence of a Polish wedding is determined and measured by the amount of beer and liquor served and consumed. A double box load of beer a day is nothing unusual and this wedding served more than that.

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When the guests get too much, which thy often do, they just crawl in somewhere and sleep it off. Then a drink of coffee and water and they are ready and back for more.

Horse blankets spread on the ground, or a handy straw stack, provide the means of recuperation and were well patronized while we were there.

The bride drinks very little for she has to dance with everyone and it must have been a tiresome and enervating task for her. Single Space

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The Polish girls, at that time, before they married wore their hair in long thick braids. They as a rule, have beautiful luxuriant hair, a true crown of glory. While they remained single, they never put it up.

After the dancing and revelry had proceeded for a certain time, well into the afternoon, the brides mother came out and called to the bride.

They wore white aprons and the ceremony of the hair was enacted. Up to this time the bride has worn her hair in braids. The mother coiled those thick heavy braids on the head and pinned them up. She had then formally passed from girlhood to womanly maturity. The groom is around but he does not figure in a very big way at least during the time we were there.

After the hair ceremony the father of the bride passed out cigars to the men. The mother then gathered up the corners of her little white apron, to form a receptacle and passed slowly among the guests, who pitched coin and paper money into the apron. As this proceeded the orchestra played a rather haunting melody, resembling gypsy music.

This is the way the bride gets her presents in the form of money. We did not know about this and brought some linen pieces to give to the bride, but we also placed some money in the apron.

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Following all this the dancing and eating and drinking was resumed and continued through the afternoon. Single Space

That evening great stacks of large white iron stone plates were brought out and placed on the floor of the dancing pavillion, well toward one side in front of a sort of board backstop. I can show you what these plates are like. I have one here. Notice how large, thick and heavy 5 they are. This game or ceremony was carried on with the usual solemnity and seriousness, which seemed to attend all their traditional customs.

Even those who became intoxicated did it in a dignified way.

Well to go on with the story of the plates. Before the dance starts the crowd gathered around the little arena and the bride took a plate and spun it on the floor. One of the men threw a silver dollar at it but missed. The money rolled to one side where it was left laying. Then another tried it. The idea is to break the plate and then who so ever does gets to dance with the bride. No break, no dance. [Some?] threw half dollars. You can see that it takes quite a blow to break this heavy plate but somehow a number of the men succeeded in doing it, as the dance went on.

All the money was left laying there whether or not it had broken a plate. The bride gathered all this up and it belonged to her. Another way of giving presents to the bride. Those plates are always purchased by the brides parents beforehand for the occasion.

She was getting a little weary of dancing and no doubt was sometimes glad when they missed breaking the plate. This was just the first day too and the celebration sometimes five days. Single Space

Some of the guests go home for the night, while others stay there, depending on how they feel about it. But they have to manage their own sleeping accommodations that is except the relative guests. We went home that night and returned the third day as we thought we should pay our respects once more. The father greeted us and offered drinks as we drove

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up. That time we declined and he did not look to be in the least offended. He led us to the homes, just as he did when we arrived the first day. The feasting, drinking and dancing still went on but not [on?] such a 6 large scale. Weddings to the Polish are a momentous event and they go in great herds to attend them.

They are still carried on pretty much the same way today although I cannot say how the hair ceremony is performed now. The girls, not many of them at any rate, wear long braids. They may have some other way to symbolize the passing of girl hood and the arrival at womanhood maturity.

POLISH FUNERALS

We were invited to attend the funeral of John [Hisioc?] at Silver Creek. The Polish follow this custom in their funerals of asking certain people to come. After the church services, the family lined up in the vestibule, on either side of the casket and shook hands with every one as they left the church.

We attended the house services first and when we drove into the yard the sons of the family came out and met us. Much as they do at weddings. They escorted us to the room where the casket was and the same knelt on the floor as we stood before the departed. Then as we turned away, they arose [?] themselves and led us out.

When the [?] left the church, they all walked to the cemetery, carrying the casket and led by the priest. Single Space

There in that little sandhills cemetery, everybody, man, woman and child knelt down in the sand and [?] as the priest said the last rites.

When he finished and turned away it was the signal for all to rise up. We knelt with the rest and I got in the sand burrs. They stuck me and were tormenting but I endured it all in order

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not to make a movement to dislodge them with the possibility of disturbing the solemn ceremony.

But there in those foreign colonies they have very little lawlessness, 7 but still adhere to their clannishness. This is particularly true of the Swiss who are a kindly, patient [peasonable?] people.

The church used to aid in bring new people to this country from Europe. Then the relatives would reimburse the church and carry on the work themselves. They take their religion, work and play very seriously and cooperate within their group for the general good of all.

The people whom I told you about at the Polish wedding are of farmer or peasant origin and in their group practices have perfected a very elaborate system of social and ceremonial activities.

The upper or more aristocratic classes do not let themselves go or cast the dignity of their station in life aside in celebrating or observing occasions, such as the Polish wedding. I manage our three farms, two at Silver Creek and still maintain my residence there as I can better feel that the memory of my husband is kept alive and honored more by so doing.